PRIZE

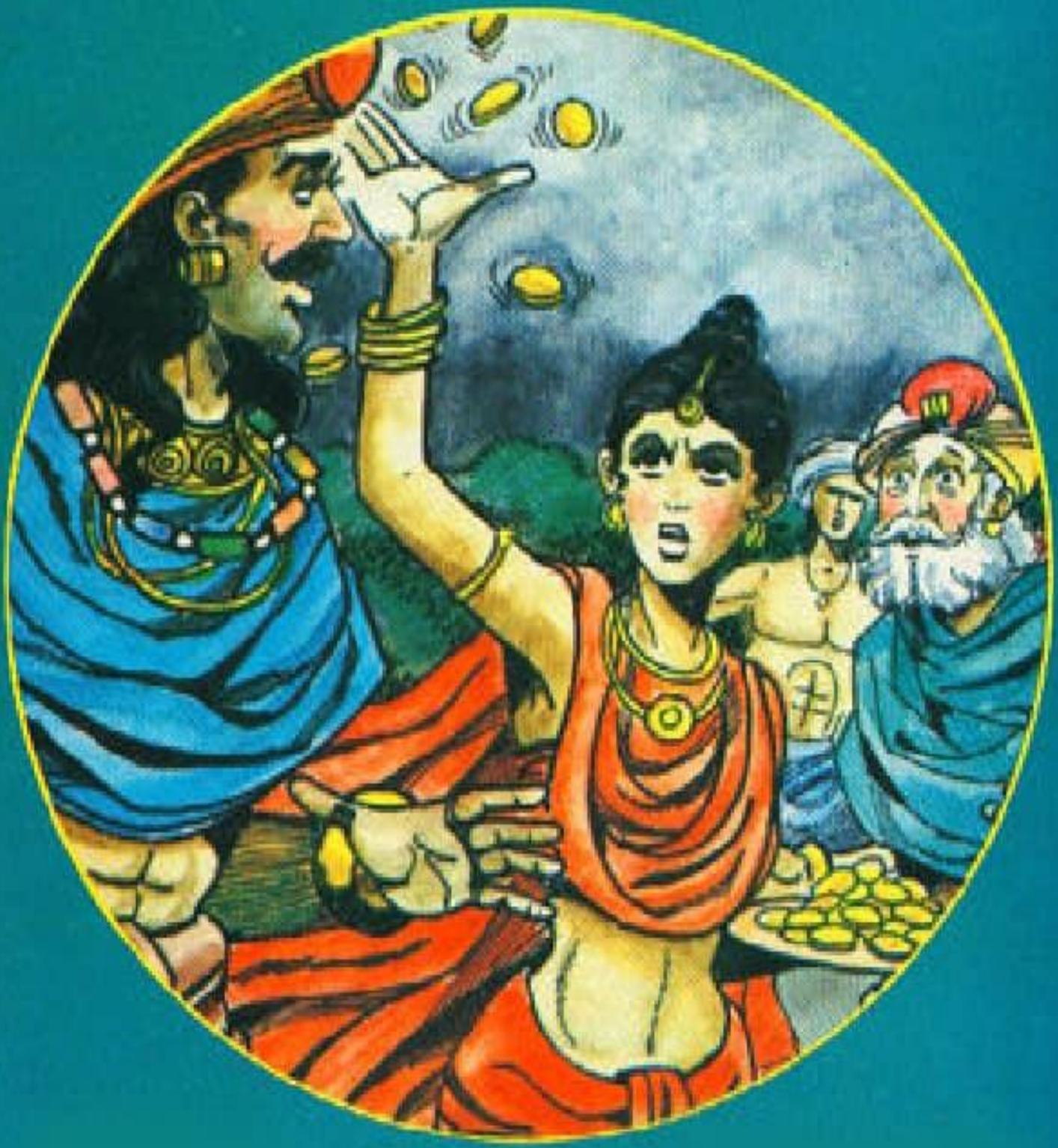


Image: Tapas Guha

Author: Jaishankar Prasad

Jaishankar Prasad

Jaishankar Prasad was not only a great Hindi poet but also a remarkable artist, playwright, and novelist. Born into a wealthy family in Kashi, he was a gentle, sweet, and friendly person. He was loved by all for his practical wisdom. Being sensitive, questioning societal principles came naturally to him. He never considered any opinion final. Due to these qualities, his stories have found a special place in literature.

This same ideology is reflected in his sensitive story **Puruskar** (Prize).

In was rainy season. Dark clouds swirled in the sky. Thunder rumbled. A strong wind blew, and a few drops of rain fell. The Maharaja's procession arrived amid cheers.

Today, the agricultural festival was being celebrated in Kosala country.

On this day, the Maharaja became a farmer for one day. He would plough the select piece of land and then sow seeds.

The original owner of the land was paid four times the value of the land, and the then field became the king's property.

That year Madhulika's land was chosen. All the residents of Kosala gathered on her land.

The king dismounted. Beautiful girls sang auspicious songs. Pandits chanted mantras. Then the king began ploughing the land. The people showered him with flowers and puffed rice.

This festival of Kosala was famous far and wide.

People from other states also came to participate. This year, Prince Arun of Magadha came to the festival.

After ploughing, the king had to sow the seeds. Madhulika walked with the king, carrying seeds in a tray. Everyone looked at the king, but Arun only looked at Madhulika!

The king slowly sowed all the seeds. The plate was now empty. The king put some gold coins in it. This was the price for the land.

Madhulika bowed to the plate. Then picked up the coins and gave them back to the king. She said, “Your Majesty! This is my ancestral land. I am willing to give it to you. But I will not sell it.”

Hearing this, the old minister cried out, "Fool! Don't insult the king's kindness. From today, you are under the protection of the kingdom. Consider this your fortune."

The king asked, “Who is this girl?”

"Your Majesty, she is the daughter of the brave Singhamitra, the one who saved Kosala from Magadha in the Battle of Varanasi."

The king thought, then returned to his camp without saying anything.

The celebration ended with cheers.

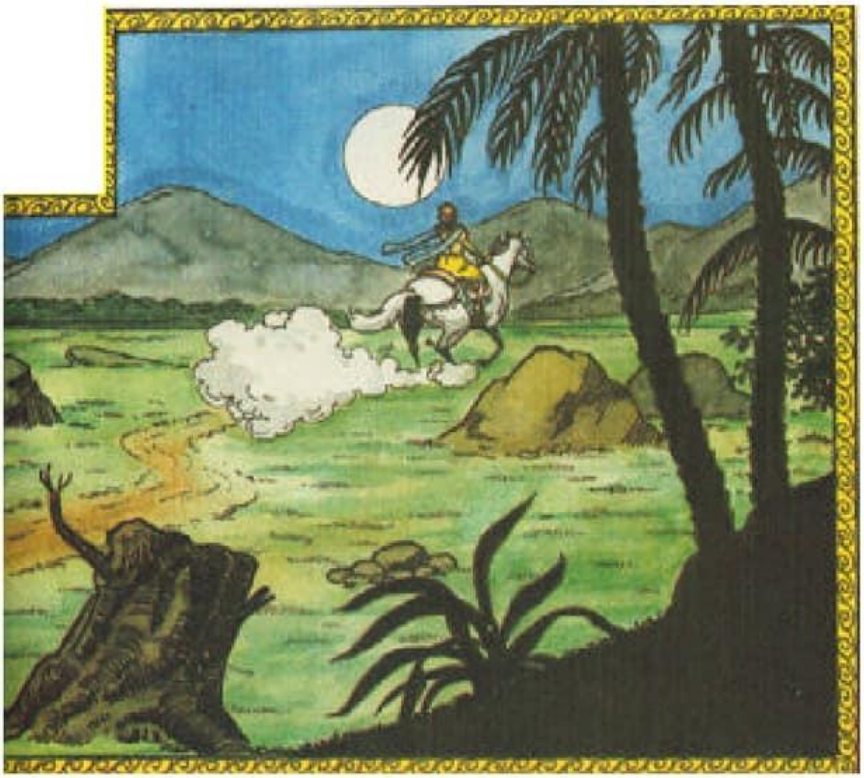
Night fell, but Prince Arun couldn't sleep. He set out on his horse. While wandering, he came upon a banyan tree.

Madhulika slept under the tree, her head resting on her hand. She looked beautiful and innocent in her sleep! Arun silently watched her intently.

Suddenly, the cuckoo called out. Madhulika woke up. Seeing a stranger in front of her, she sat up.

Arun said, "I am the prince of Magadha. I saw you at the festival this morning. Since then, I have admired your courage and beauty."

"Don't joke, Prince. I'm very sad today. Don't insult me and please leave me alone," Madhulika said. Then she left.



The prince felt hurt and returned. Madhulika stared at the dust for a while, tears welling up in her eyes.

Then in her heart, Madhulika decided to start her life afresh.

Having lost her land, Madhulika began to toil on other people's fields. She ate whatever she could find and then slept in her hut.

In this way three years passed.

It was a winter night. The sky was filled with clouds. Lightning flashed intermittently. Madhulika sat in her hut, shivering. Today, after a long time, she remembered the past. Prince Arun's loving words! Now she felt sad—she should have listened to Arun!

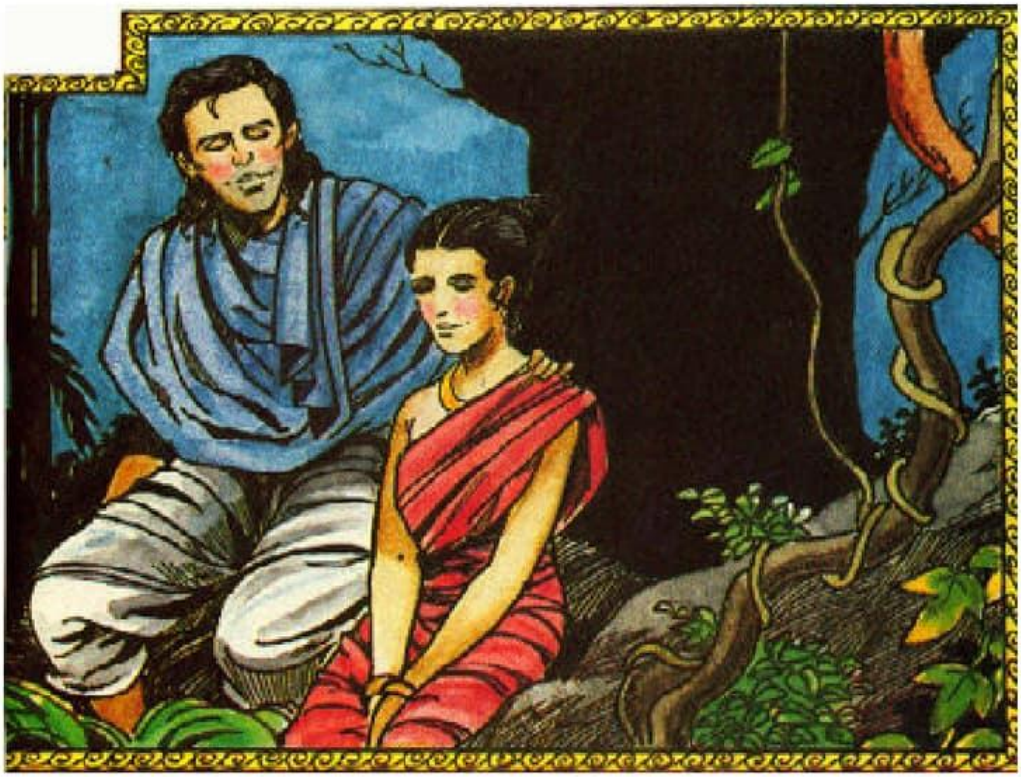
Just then, there was a knock on the door. “Who is there? A traveler needs shelter,” came a voice from outside.

As soon as the door opened, lightning flashed. Madhulika cried out, "Prince!" Arun was also surprised to see her. He paused and said, “Now I am a rebel. I have been expelled from Magadha. I have come to live in Kosala."

Madhulika smiled and said, “You are welcome.”

By then the rain stopped. Arun and Madhulika sat under the banyan tree in the moonlight, washed through the fog. Madhulika felt very happy today. Arun spoke cautiously.

"I will establish a new kingdom. I will make you my queen. You love me, don't you, Madhulike?" Arun asked, squeezing her hands.



Madhulika was very happy today. Sitting beside Prince Arun, she had forgotten all her miseries and sorrows. Madhulika was lost in her world of dreams. Then Arun said, "You will have to help me establish a new kingdom."

“I will do whatever you say!” said Madhulika.

And then Arun told her his plan.

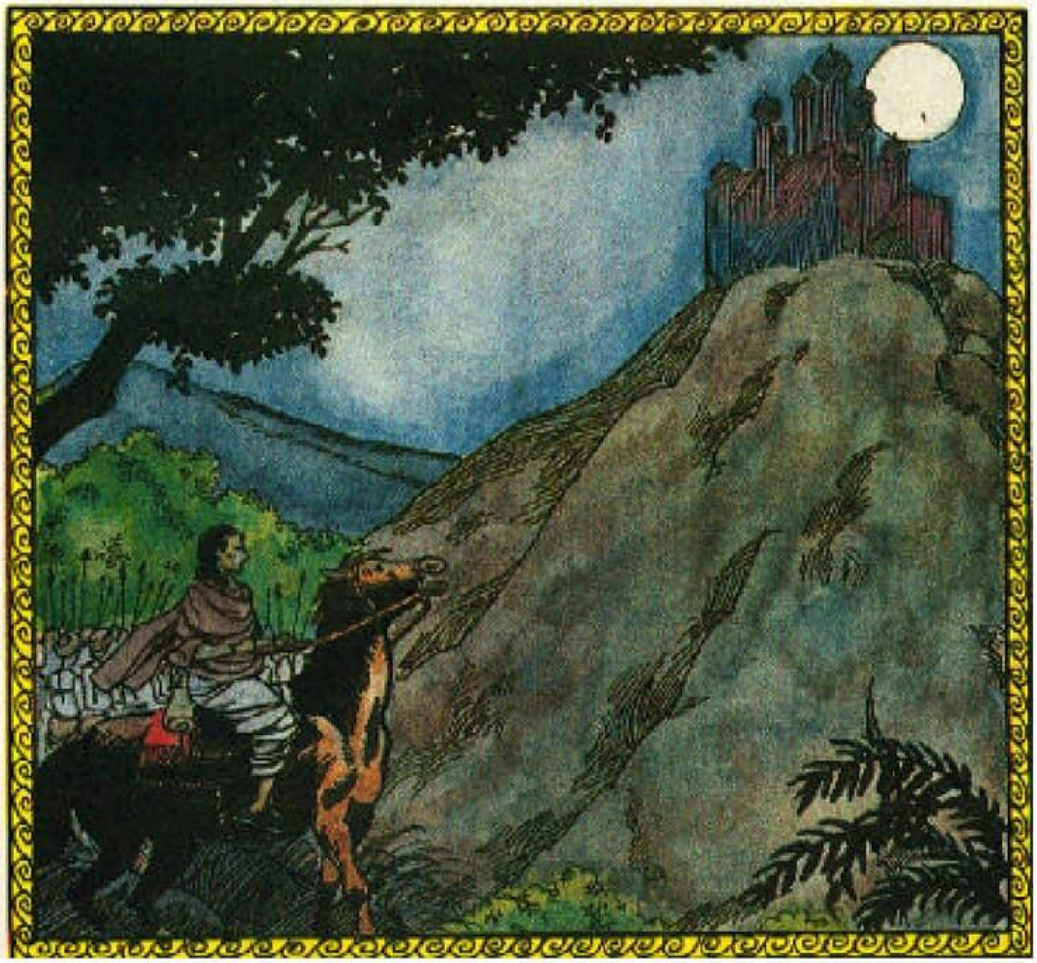
Madhulika went to meet the king at his palace. After saluting him, she said, “It's been three years, my Lord, since my land was taken away for farming.”

"So you've come to ask for its price. Tell me, what do you want?"

"I need land equal to my farm near the southern drain of the fort."

The king agreed.

The land near the fort's southern drain was of military importance. Soldiers were stationed there to guard the fort. After Madhulika received the land, the king’s soldiers were removed from there.

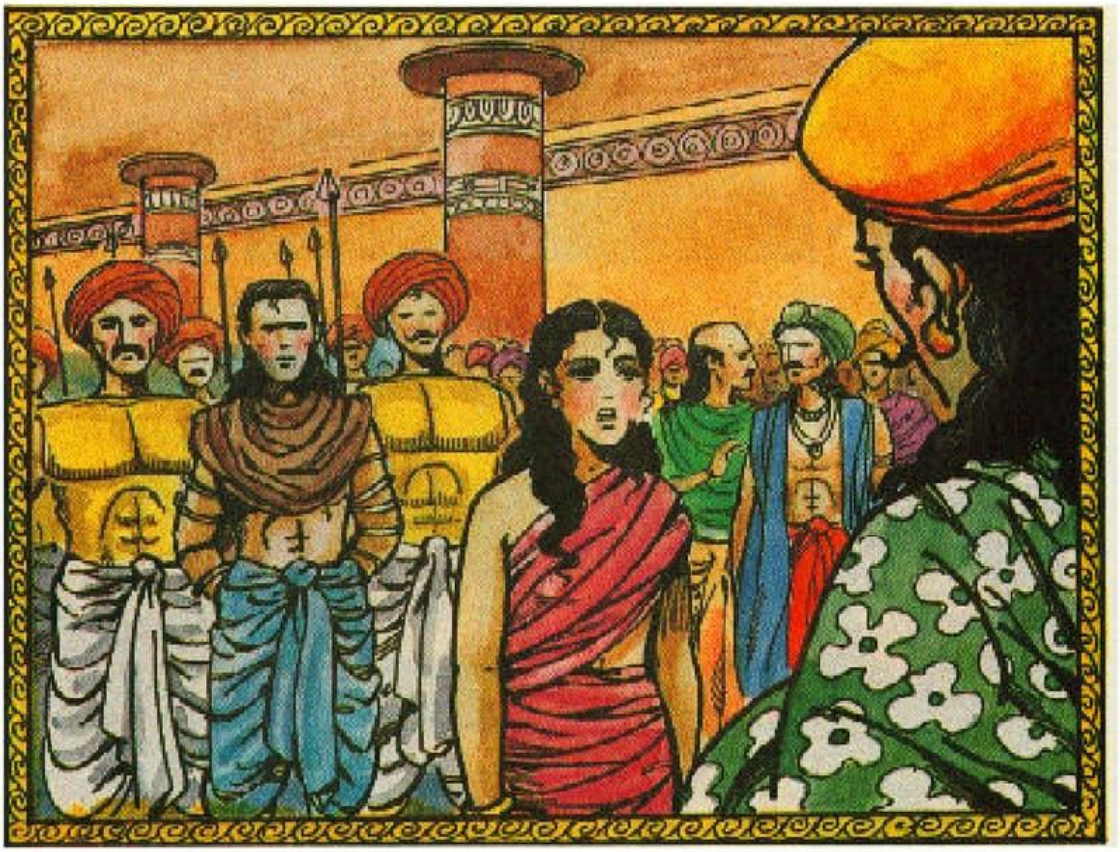


Arun hid in the dense forest with his troops. He planned to attack the king's fort from there.

Madhulika's heart condemned her. "My father saved Kosala. As his daughter, I am helping the enemy? No, never!"

Thinking about this, she ran here and there. Suddendly, the commander of Kosala appeared ahead with his troops. She fell at his feet and said, “Sir, the fort will be attacked tonight. The bandits will come from the southern drain. Do something quickly."

The soldiers ran towards the southern drain.



Arun was caught while preparing the attack.

His plan was thus foiled. He was captured and sentenced to death by the king.

Then Madhulika was called. She came and stood there like a mad woman. The king said, “Madhulika, ask for any reward you want.”

“I should also be given the death penalty!” Saying this Madhulika went and stood next to Arun.